



STATE OF MINNESOTA

Office of Governor Mark Dayton

130 State Capitol ♦ 75 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard ♦ Saint Paul, MN 55155

December 19, 2017

Dear Members of the Minnesota Congressional Delegation:

I am writing to share the State of Minnesota's priorities for the next Farm Bill. In preparation for the next Farm Bill, I directed the commissioners of relevant state agencies—Department of Agriculture, Department of Human Services, Department of Health, Department of Natural Resources, Pollution Control Agency, and Board of Water and Soil Resources—to identify the state's priorities for the next farm bill by engaging with key stakeholders and listening to Minnesotans. The results of those conversations are reflected in this letter.

Minnesota is an agricultural powerhouse ranking in the top 10 nationally in corn, soybean, sugarbeet, pork, dairy, beef, and turkey production. Minnesota's agriculture sector provides more than 340,000 jobs and creates \$90 billion in economic activity. But the Farm Bill reaches far beyond just farmers. It impacts every Minnesotan through its influence on nutrition, the environment, and beyond. The state of Minnesota would like to see a 2018 Farm Bill that focuses on fostering a robust farm and rural economy, maintaining a strong nutrition title, and prioritizing conservation and water quality programs.

Farm and Rural Economy

The next Farm Bill will have a profound impact on the health of Minnesota's farm and rural economies. To that end, the state of Minnesota supports a strong agricultural safety net, updates to the Margin Protection Program (MPP) for Dairy, a new Animal Pest and Disease Prevention Program, expansion of rural broadband access, and maintenance of the industrial hemp pilot program.

- Agricultural safety net programs like Crop Insurance (CI), Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC), and Price Loss Coverage (PLC) provide farmers with the security they need to increase crop yields, improve efficiencies, and stay competitive in world markets. These programs need to be maintained in the next Farm Bill. Minnesota's dairy farmers are operating within extremely tight markets with a high level of uncertainty. MPP must be updated in order to fulfill its promise of providing a reliable safety net for dairy farmers.
- Minnesota is the number one turkey producer in the country and the 2015 Highly Pathogenic Avian Flu outbreak was the largest and costliest animal disease response in U.S. history. According to the USDA, the outbreak cost taxpayers \$1 billion in indemnity, response, and cleanup costs. A proactive, multi-faceted animal disease program is needed to safeguard animal agriculture and prevent catastrophic events that could threaten our nation's food security, trade partnerships, and economic stability. It is important to take a "One Health" approach to this effort, recognizing that the health of humans, animals, and the environment are all interconnected.

- Everything from business to education, medical appointments to social interactions takes place online putting Minnesotans who live in rural areas that lack broadband infrastructure at a disadvantage. Rural broadband funding should be maintained and, if possible, increased.
- Minnesota has completed its second growing season under the industrial hemp pilot program. Pilots are allowed to study the growth, cultivation, and marketing of industrial hemp. In Minnesota in 2017, approximately 42 growers planted over 2,000 acres in 26 counties. Industrial hemp encourages crop diversity in Minnesota and offers a new market to farmers. The industrial hemp pilot program should be continued in the next Farm Bill.

Nutrition

Keeping a strong nutrition title—including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), and the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP)—*within* the Farm Bill is a top priority for the state of Minnesota.

- The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) helped almost 12% of Minnesota's population purchase food during FY 2016. Seventy percent of SNAP recipients in Minnesota are families with children, adults with disabilities, and seniors. In order to maintain the effectiveness of SNAP, the state of Minnesota requests no funding cuts, block granting, or changes in work requirements or time limits for able-bodied adults without dependents. Broad-based categorical eligibility for SNAP and the SNAP Standard Utility Allowance for recipients of federal energy assistance (LIHEAP) should be maintained.
- Funding for the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) should remain at current levels. TEFAP provides low-income families with healthy foods via food banks and food shelves. Families on SNAP usually cannot make it through the month on the amount of SNAP benefits they receive and turn to food shelves to help supplement their diet.
- The Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) provides low-income senior citizens with healthy foods such as fruits, vegetables, meat or fish, dry milk, and cereal. Approximately 15,000 nutritionally dense food packages were distributed monthly to Minnesota seniors in 2016 in order to supplement their diet and help them stretch their food dollars. Funding for CSFP is critical to maintaining the health of senior citizens and should remain at current levels.

Conservation and Water

The Farm Bill has the ability to encourage conservation efforts, improve water quality, bolster the health of the environment, and help protect Minnesota's drinking water supply. In order to maintain a strong Agriculture economy and strong rural communities, we must do more to invest in conservation practices that protect our drinking water, lakes, and rivers. The vast majority of Minnesota farmers are good stewards of the land and their efforts are supported through programs like the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), and the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). Continued support of Swampbuster and Sodsaver will also help preserve current conservation efforts. Expanding support for cover crops and simple updates to food labeling standards present new conservation opportunities.

- The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) should be reformed by: 1) increasing the acreage cap to 40 million acres, 2) allowing states to have input on prioritizing program acres, including the possible prioritization of lands that have been converted to water quality buffer strips, 3) and reducing lag time for valuation of CRP rates in order to prevent distortions in the land rental market.
- The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) should be preserved and all existing CREP agreements should remain in effect. In Minnesota, 60,000 acres will be permanently protected and will provide critical water quality and habitat benefits.
- The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) should continue to be funded in order to provide financial assistance to producers to implement and maintain conservation practices. The RCPP provides funding for innovative conservation programs like the highly successful Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program. In addition, funding should be provided to implement projects identified in recent RCPP funded planning efforts, like the Red River Basin of the North Flood Prevention Plan
- Swampbuster and Sodsaver have been effective at preventing the conversion of vital wetlands and grasslands. These conservation compliance provisions should be carried forward in the next Farm Bill. Additionally, the “perennial crop loophole” should be closed to further strengthen Sodsaver.
- The Farm Bill should encourage the incorporation of cover crops into farmers’ rotations. Cover crops prevent wind and water erosion, improve water and soil quality, reduce runoff, and protect groundwater quality by preventing chemicals from leaching into the water table. Funding should be made available for research on new cover crops and for marketing assistance for innovative crops like Kernza and pennycress.
- There is no federal system regulating the “sell by,” “best by,” “use by,” and other date labels on food. Manufacturers have broad discretion over how expiration dates on foods are selected, and these dates typically reflect quality and taste rather than safety. Inconsistent practices lead to useable foods unnecessarily being discarded. Standardizing and clarifying date labels on food would make it easier for families to keep safe, wholesome foods on the dinner table instead of in landfills.

The State of Minnesota looks forward to working with you to create a strong Farm Bill that works for all Minnesotans. If you have any questions, please contact Tenzin Dolkar, my Agriculture Policy Advisor, at (651) 201-3478 or Tenzin.Dolkar@state.mn.us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Dayton', is written over the printed name.

Mark Dayton
Governor